

Report on the Biennial World Volunteer Conference (IAVE)
Edmonton Alberta Canada August 23 – 27 1998

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Leading into the Next Millenium – A Global Quest for Volunteer Effort

Conference Location : The University of Alberta and the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium, both in Edmonton Alberta, Canada.

Alberta was chosen for the Conference because of its success in hosting a provincial volunteer conference held by the Canadian Wild Rose Foundation and attended by the Board of Directors of IAVE in 1995, proving its leadership and ability in hosting a conference of this nature.

The Canadian government made available the premises and dorms of Alberta University as well as free transportation. The main Canadian NGO sponsor was the Wild Rose Foundation which took charge of administration responsibilities largely by means of volunteers among whom 1000 youth were deployed. Large scale private sector funds were raised in Canada and world wide.

About IAVE :

The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) is a world wide organization created in 1970 to promote the work of volunteers and the value of volunteering. Through IAVE volunteering is said to be realized as a global force working for social change and economic development. IAVE has a vision of a world in which people commit their time talents and energy as volunteers to help one another and to build healthy educated communities – of a world in which definition of a fulfilling productive life includes volunteer development.

IAVE is the only international membership organization solely dedicated to promoting strengthening and celebrating volunteering worldwide. It is a network of organizations with individual and organizational members in over 65 countries. It is governed by an elected international Board of Directors.

IAVE holds its conferences every two years. The first was in Washington D.C. in 1988, then in Paris in 1990; Buenos Aires, 1992; Tokyo 1994 and Cape Town 1996.

The Aim of the Biennial Volunteer Conference

- Increase awareness of volunteering.
- Establish relationships among volunteers and volunteer leaders world wide,
- Share information and resources .
- Increase the involvement of volunteers through creative and local leadership.
- Provide training opportunities where none are currently available .
- Highlight the importance of the business sector partnership/-collaborative potentials into the next millenium.

The participants:

The conference brings together from all around the world a broad cross section of decision –makers and leaders in the volunteer, business and government sectors who should return to their respective communities with new ideas and skills that will assist them in making a difference,

The conference workshops are designed to satisfy the needs of directors of Boards, volunteer managers, treasurers, fund raisers, grassroots volunteers, committee types, staff from all levels of government and private sector , consultant-agents.

The number of participants was about 2800 from 92 countries Including 90 individuals with CIDA scholarships and 230 with Canadian Heritage scholarships from every province and territory in Canada. Participation from the Arab World included besides Egypt, Algeria, Jourdan, Soudan and Palestine.

There were 220 speakers who presented papers in workshops on almost every conceivable topic related to voluntarism.

Opening Ceremony

A song written exclusively for the IAVE conference by a gifted Alberta song writer was presented.

The evening entertainment included a breath taking performance by volunteers of the Vohon Dancers who presented a skilful blending of Ukranian folk dance , with modern and jazz dance.

Messages were given by Jean Chretien, prime minister of Canada, and Ralph Klein Premier of Alberta, Shirley Mc Lellan minister responsible for the Wild Rose Foundation, Ken Allen the World President of IAVE, Bill Smith the mayor of Edmonton, Krishan C. Joshee chairman of Wild Rose Foundation and Stan Fisher Executive Director of Wild Rose Foundation.

Quotes from Chretien: “ the voluntarism of concerned citizens in Canada was in evidence during flood disasters, ice-storms, tornadoes etc. that explains United Nation’s ranking of Canada as a preferred country to live in. It is these individual volunteers networking together during times of need who help build a strong social fabric at home and earn Canada the enviable reputation as a compassionate nation around the world.”

The World President Ken Allen said” We believe that people can make a difference in the lives of others, when they volunteer their time talent and energy to make their communities better places in which to live.”

The key note speaker at the opening ceremony was Ruben Nelson and the topic was “ Moving beyond voluntarism to voluntary action, the challenge of the 21st Century “. The noted futurist argued that voluntarism, a relatively new phenomenon – is not going to be enough to meet the needs of the 21st Century. We must find new ways to think about, design and do voluntary action..

Other key note speakers in the next sessions were as follows:

Ms Helen Lieberman, Cape Town South Africa. Topic: Rethinking voluntarism. She said that people power was the most valuable resource for rebuilding the new South Africa or any nation. How do we foster a spirit of voluntarism that is productive instead of damaging,

Sharon Capeling Alajika Bonn Germany. Topic the Upcoming International Year of volunteers 2001. (report attached) Ms Alajika is the executive Coordinator of United Nations Volunteers.

Madam Huguette Labelle, Hull Quebec Canada, President of Canadian CIDA also Chancellor of the University of Ottawa. Topic “ CIDA and the Volunteer Sector – Past Present and Future.”

Other Activities

A gala dinner was held at the Agro-Economic Exhibition Hall where prime - minister Chretien delivered a speech followed by native entertainment.

A visit to Edmonton Park a museum of life in Edmonton, a fun night where barbecue was offered and entertainment given by street performers.

Off site Community Tours

940 delegates visited 9 different communities and over 130 volunteer organizations within the city of Edmonton and surrounding regions. It was a great way to experience the volunteer spirit in a wide range of organizations.

We took the town of Morinville tour which included a video viewing that illustrates how this vibrant community deals with poverty, recreation and volunteer appreciation. We visited a site where collaborative action between the city council, several NGOs and private sector contribution resulted in creating a park in a garbage dumping ground, improving the environment for birds and human beings through garbage disposal, canal cleaning and providing walking alleys for pedestrians and handicapped where there had been none- and all was done by volunteers who posted signs in the name of each contributor annexed to a little club. This model was being reproduced all over the country.

Workshops

In addition to the Keynote sessions and the entertainment evenings there were 8 workshop of 220 sessions . We the Egyptian participants attended the following sessions;

Aug. 24

1 "Who is a Volunteer ? by Susan Ellis and Linda Graff. (75 minutes.) It is partly a question of language and partly a matter of cultural and social perspective on the whole concert of voluntary action,

2 "Building Effective Coalitions in the Volunteer Sector" Part 1 by Dale Safrit and Lynn Borden. (75min.) Acting locally and thinking globally.

3 Part 2 of above session (75min.)

August 25

1 The Calgary Workplace Volunteer Council by Kelly O/Grady Ramsay, Tomney(75min)

What happens when you bring a number of corporations to the table to talk about ways of working together to better the community ?

2 Advocates for Change – Part 1 by Kathy Deyell and Judy D. Johnson (75 min) The Canadian Federation for Junior Leagues believes that service and advocacy are inextricably linked . Volunteers can play a more effective role by broadening their service delivery work to include advocating for change. Learn how to do it in a practically positive way..

3 Part 2 of above session.

August 27

1 A High Stakes Affair –Managing Risks in Volunteer Programs part 1 Find where your potential weak spots are and how to shore them up.

2 Part 2 as above

3 Communication skills for the communication age by Suzan Christie. A workshop for enhancing, strengthening and forming individual communication skills.

International Year of Volunteers 2001

On November 20 1997 the General Assembly of the United Nations formally passed a resolution declaring the Year 2001 to be the International Year of the Volunteers. The United Nations' Volunteer Program called UNV has been officially designated to be the focal point agency to give leadership for the Year under its executive Coordinator Sharon Capeling Alajika who was one of the main speakers at the IAVE Conference.

It was recognized that the years leading up to 2001 are a unique opportunity to gather new information on the nature and scope of volunteering in the world and to build the interest of governments and volunteers world wide.

IAVE has worked closely with UNV and will make world wide celebrations of the Year 2001 to be its top priority concern as follows

IAVE Biennial World conference will be held in January 2001 in Amsterdam as the first global event of the International Year .

IAVE encourages participants at the Edmonton Conference to become members of IAVE.

IAVE encourages its members to establish national committees to plan celebration of the International Year of the Volunteers.

IAVE encourages the organization of local and national celebrations of the International Volunteer day - December 5 - in 1998 and 1999 and 2000 to build interest in the International Year .

IAVE also encourages its five regions each to plan their regional conferences for the end of 2001 or the beginning of 2002..

Closing Program and Ceremonies

Keynote Presenter: Barry Spiltchuck

A professional speaker and trainer – co-author of the New York Times best selling book “ Chicken Soup for the Soul. He is described as Canada’s Dale Carnegie, as he inspires other to have a greater degree of love and understanding in life . He teaches how to eliminate “ self sabotage” through his Executive Esteem Program. Despite the seriousness of his message, he conveyed it in an extremely hilarious manner and captured his audience helping them to end the program on a very cheerful note.

Closing Ceremony Extravaganza

It was the night of all nights – a presentation by one of the brightest young stars of the music scene to-day Nathalie McMaster . Her concert was a dazzling blend of musical virtuosity and lively step dancing making it a memorable exhilarating evening.

Conclusion

It was a great learning experience but there was not enough time to encompass all the valuable knowledge made available in this great conference. What we plan to do at NCPD :

We are applying for membership of IAVE which is very flexible and accepts individuals as well as organizations.

We shall keep in touch with the organization as Mary Ripley the founder of IAVE is a close friend of Aziza’s since the founding of IAVE and

she asked us to cooperate in the organization of one of the Regional Conferences in Cairo next year.

We collected a good number of publications from the Conference Resource Center which will be very useful in our activities. We are already thinking of translating into Arabic those publications considered most appropriate to our work.

We made contacts with many individual experts and groups from Canada and from different countries..

Consultations took place about convening a regional IAVE meeting in Cairo before the International Year of the Volunteers 2001.

In the interim, national activities will take place to prepare for the IYV aiming to realize the following objectives:

- Increase awareness of volunteering
- Establish relationships among volunteers and volunteer leaders throughout Egypt and worldwide.
- Share information and resources within and outside of the NCPD network; and promote links with volunteer resource centers around the world..
- Develop projects for mutual cooperation between select Canadian and Egyptian towns and municipalities with a view to duplicate successful multi-sectoral collaborative models between voluntary organizations, government municipalities and other sectors of civil society such as the private business, educational institutions and the like.(as observed in off-site visits around Edmonton Alberta.)
- Increase the involvement of volunteers through creative leadership at the local, regional and local grassroots levels.
- Provide training activities where none are currently available.
- Highlight the importance of the business sector partnership-collaboration potentials into the next millenium.

Reflections

What we have learned – We learned that there is a difference between voluntarism and voluntary action. Voluntarism represents a standing humanistic tradition, whereas voluntary action represents collective movement towards a goal - a collective commitment to collaborate with other sectors of society in order to meet challenges facing us in the future. The stakeholders in voluntary action should not be drawn exclusively

from the voluntary sector. Voluntarism in the old sense will not meet by itself the challenges of the 21st Century.

Voluntarism, however, is the underlying base of citizen participation. The essence of voluntarism is spiritual and as such it must balance if not over ride the material form of any organization. Voluntarism is motivated by altruism, compassion and willingness to help those in need. Such a spirit is latent in every individual in the world throughout history, it only requires nurturing and tapping by concerned citizens. In the past 40 years voluntarism received increasing attention and recognition throughout the world. Two global events have boosted voluntarism giving it truly global proportions : the Biennial World Volunteer Conference held at Edmonton and ,1998 and the designation by the United Nations of the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers. The slogan “ Think globally and Act Locally “ becomes a very apt theme under these circumstances. In fact individual citizens are beginning to identify themselves with humanity as a whole and to see that their contributions to their local societies will ultimately benefit the whole world, in one way or another.

Furthermore a great deal of experience and sophistication has been gained in the world in the past decades.. Examples, observed at the Conference, indicate that there are volunteer skills and live models in modern day society in the domain of recruiting mobilizing advocating and training which could be emulated with great advantage, making a big difference in improving social life. A great deal of the business sector technology of management has been adapted to these voluntary undertakings in the developed world.

Moreover the volunteer spirit itself has been borrowed by the private sector as well as by government. and this should be encouraged in our part of the world.

Canada is an example where the society, the government and business rely on volunteers. And many successful enterprises are attributable to volunteers as a result of good collaborative effort. on the part of various sectors. Traditional volunteering is giving way to new types of voluntarism adaptable to the technological age which should lead us into the 21st Century.

Taking another angle, volunteering seems to have more appeal, particularly to bureaucratic circles, than voluntary action as defined above. Volunteers could be addressed separately and co-opted by established institutions or government without threat to power. But voluntary action has political connotations. It entails mobilization of citizens, albeit around innocent and acceptable social issues, which

nevertheless may represent a power threat to a political institution or to a government, particularly those governments which may not be ready to share power with their organized citizenry outside of conventional channels. Throughout the ages the State has not been comfortable with powerful civil society movements and has therefore systematically sought to curtail their expansion through legislation.

Traditional volunteering has also passed through ideological phases veering from autocracy to liberalism according to the current social and political environment. There is first the philanthropic paternalistic approach expressing religious values as was witnessed in Egypt at the turn of the century when individuals had the freedom to contribute towards the establishment of institutions, like universities, hospitals and other major services that could not be provided by the State. There is also the integrated system of philanthropy instituted by Islam under the name of Zakaat, a form of voluntary self taxation which has been applied in the past 14 centuries to promote social services around the mosques. There was also the system of endowments, called, Wakf whereby individuals would donate funds in trust for special services. Alternatively Moslem Zakaat has a counterpart in the Egyptian Christian tradition called Al 'Oshour which means contribution of one tenth of income

There are also examples in Egypt from the forties where the government applied collaborative approaches for generating grass roots participation, a kind of aided self help approach in rural areas which gained United Nations' recognition during the fifties, and which had many ramifications in subsequent governmental rural development efforts, the most prominent one being, the project called Shorouk.

Now is the time for us to look forward to a dynamic movement of voluntary action which should entail cooperation and collaboration with different sectors of society including government and private business in order to meet the challenges before us in the future and which no one could possibly address by himself alone.

The first nucleus for such collaborative action in Egypt took place in the nineties around the ICPD when Egyptian NGOS, government and private sector coalesced to make the Population Conference and its NGO Forum the best world event ever. Now the Egyptian government is beginning to give a listening ear to the quest of NGOS to participate constructively in development within an open democratic civil society.

So nothing is totally new to our volunteer tradition but we do recognize the need to evolve our volunteer culture by adapting it to the modalities of modern institutions which are characterized by sound management, technological skills, fiscal responsibility and public accountability.

However in the face of new challenges and new values of commercialism creeping into the world, we must be cognizant of the importance of reinstating and maintaining the values of voluntarism in our human relations, the spirit which gives without expectation of return, as opposed to the market place values where every thing has to be paid for and owned, even ideas. In this connection tensions over ownership of ideas and intellectual property seem to run counter to the spirit of voluntarism and to create more unhappiness and less development in the world at large.

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